



1890s cartoon of Cecil Rhodes

Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism

Lenin's "[Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism](#)" (a file of the final chapter is attached, and is also downloadable via the link below) takes its rightful place here as one of the classics of the Marxist canon.

Lenin's classic works of the early years of the RSDLP ([What is to](#)

[be Done?](#), [One Step Forward, Two Steps Back](#), and [Two Tactics of Social Democracy in the Democratic Revolution](#)) established the revolutionary posture and methods of that party, in the face of the Menshevik, “economist”, reformist opposition within its ranks.

Marxists Internet Archive has a page of links to [Selected Works of Lenin](#), which contains a number of other candidates for any collection of classics. There is also Lenin’s 1909 book on philosophy, called “[Materialism and Empirio-Criticism](#)”. But for this brief course of “Classics”, because space and time constrain us, we will leave most of these titles aside. The total number of documents authored by Lenin and available on the Marxists Internet Archive is 4170. They are listed and hyperlinked [by date](#), and [alphabetically](#).

After a few years of attenuated bourgeois democracy, what confronted the RSDLP in 1914 was an international intra-Imperialist struggle that suddenly metastasized into the most terrible war that the world had ever seen. The split that it caused in the Second International was more than a problem. It was a catastrophe for the working-class movement. But even more than that, the phenomenon called Imperialism was a problem for the world that has not yet, in 2014, gone away.

Lenin was constantly studying. From 1896 to 1899 he studied prodigiously to produce the large work called “[The Development of Capitalism in Russia](#)”. In the first decade of the new century he began to study philosophy intensively. Then he began to study Imperialism.

In those days the term “Imperialism” was not impossible for any bourgeois to utter, as is often the case today. The term was common in daily journalism. It was an English liberal, J A Hobson, who wrote the first attemptedly definitive book on the subject, published in 1902 as “[Imperialism, a study](#)”. This was immediately after the Anglo-Boer War had come to an end.

It was this [Anglo-Boer War](#) that most clearly defined modern Imperialism in its beginning, as a world system, distinct from plain colonialism. Here was a metropolitan power (Britain) demanding profits without taking responsibilities, and securing its demand by force of arms. Lenin deliberately used Hobson’s work, and that of other bourgeois writers, as he frankly admits:

“To enable the reader to obtain the most well-grounded idea of imperialism, I deliberately tried to quote as extensively as possible bourgeois economists who have to admit the particularly incontrovertible facts concerning the latest stage of capitalist economy.”

In Chapter 7 of “Imperialism, The Highest Stage of Capitalism” Lenin “sums up”, in a highly compressed way, what capitalist Imperialism actually is. In the first paragraph, among other things, he says:

“...the monopolies, which have grown out of free competition, do not eliminate the latter, but exist above it and alongside it, and thereby give rise to a number of very acute, intense antagonisms, frictions and conflicts.”

Thus, Imperialism is a system dominated by monopoly.

A little later on Lenin writes: “... *politically, imperialism is, in general, a striving towards violence and reaction.*”

South Africa has seen Imperialism in all its aspects, but especially in war. It was the [Anglo-Boer War](#) of 1899-1902 that announced Imperialism's intentions to the world, as much as the [Spanish-American War](#) of 1898 did, or the defeat of the [Khalifa Abdallahi](#)'s forces at [Omdurman](#) in Sudan by the British under Kitchener in the same year.



Theodore Roosevelt (US President 1901-1909) and the “Great White Fleet”

The system of state-monopoly capital, and the dominance of the mineral-energy complex over the South African productive economy, dates from that time. This system has never been fundamentally changed, and it has never brought full

employment. It has failed, but to change it will require a new confrontation with Imperialism.

Imperialism is a system of war. Lenin pours scorn on *“Kautsky's silly little fable about "peaceful" ultra-imperialism,”* calling it *“the reactionary attempt of a frightened philistine to hide from stern reality.”*

Lenin concludes:

“The question is: what means other than war could there be under capitalism to overcome the disparity between the development of productive forces and the accumulation of capital on the one side, and the division of colonies and spheres of influence for finance capital on the other?”

The age of Imperialism, for more than 115 years, has been an age of war, just as Lenin predicted it would be. From Lenin's work to that of William Blum's [“Killing Hope”](#), it is clear that Imperialism is an aggressive force which at some stage will have to be confronted and defeated. One cannot hope to be exempt from this confrontation forever. In Africa, Imperialism itself is forcing the confrontation at an increasing speed.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism, Chapter 7, 1916, Lenin.](#)
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